

# Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom*: Beyond Feminism?

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**Abstract**—Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* is a critique of patriarchy (especially patriarchy fueled by religious extremity), given added scorn with implicit sallies on capitalist tendencies. The repression of women by patriarch standards is embodied in the victimization of a number of deviant females living in a village in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. However, there are also instances of self-victimization which do not fit into the patriarchal pattern of inhibition, but rather provoke apparently undecided questions, fulfilling Churchill's expectation of playwrights in general who, according to her, "don't give answers; they ask questions" (quoted in Aston, Diamond, 2009, p. 10). Following her own precept, Churchill mocks religious fanaticism harboring belief in witches and their association with the devil, while simultaneously asking unanswered questions implicit in the "devilish" behavior of her characters.

**Index Terms**—Caryl Churchill, feminism, 17<sup>th</sup> century witch-hunts, patriarchy, oppression of women

Interviewing with Linda Fitzsimmons the "tall lithe Caryl Churchill" who "moves through the world with the same brisk and graceful angularity that propels her plays" (Keyssar, 1983, p. 198) leaves no doubt about her orientations: "I've constantly said that I am both a socialist and a feminist" (1989, p. 89). Such confidence, no doubt, arises to a high degree from her character "[y]et it is important to understand that the feminist climate of the 1970s gave Churchill 'a context for thinking of' herself 'as a woman writer.'" (Aston, Diamond, 2009, p.3). The historical moment is a key factor in conditioning self-awareness and personal development which, especially fragile in the case of female writers, entails literary arrest by circumstances of gender, race or class as was the fate of those from earlier generations or the widening of artistic horizons "in a climate of feminist change," when "theater horizons presented the 'woman writer' with more opportunities than before" (Aston, Diamond, 2009, pp. 3,4), as turned out for writers such as Churchill in the 1970s. In such a climate, Churchill began working with the Monstrous Regiment women's theater company in 1976; *Vinegar Tom* is a result of her collaboration with this company, a collaboration which "brought Churchill 'both artistic and intellectual stimulation and also a recognition that she belonged to a [woman's] movement.'" (Aston, Diamond, 2009, p.4). It is the product of an age, playwright and company highly conscious of voluntary feminism.

Feminism for Churchill involves gender concerns grappling simultaneously with issues of class in a social context; she felt strongly about both feminism and socialism not willing to solicit a form of one that would exclude the other (Aston, Diamond, 2009, p.4). Churchill could never come to terms with capitalist sentiments and, as her whole career attests, she repeatedly "returns to the pathologies induced by money-lust and to the suffering caused by the dreadful disparities capitalism creates between those who own and those who owe" (Howard, 2009, p.36). *Vinegar Tom* wraps Churchill's historical moment, feminism and socialism into an intertwined whole. And yet the play provokes some questions from the depths of its internal associations which seem to have a stake beyond feminism.

Written in 1976 when the author was also working on another play, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Vinegar Tom* shares with the former "a sense of history trampling the individual spirit" (Gussow, 1992, p. 14). The play, under the pretext of witches and witch-hunting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, rather than being about "evil, hysteria and possessions by the devil" (Churchill, 1985, p.130) is, in Churchill's own words, about "poverty humiliation and prejudice, and how women accused of witchcraft saw themselves" (p. 130). It includes a number of women deviant from the envisaged female roles of 17<sup>th</sup> century society where "the women who do not fit into the expected female roles are the ones declared as witches" (Solomon, 1981, p. 51). The play, however, is not a mere historical narrative. In her study of "witches" Churchill "discovered for the first time the extent of Christian teaching against women;" she also realized that there existed "connections between medieval attitudes to witches and continuing attitudes to women in general" (Churchill, 1987, p.39). Thus in the play she brings the 17<sup>th</sup> century into the present asking contemporary society whether it too wants to see evil in women: "evil women/is that what you want to see?/On the movie screen/of your own wet dream" (*Vinegar Tom* 21; 85-9). In preparing for the play she had realized "how petty and everyday the witches' offenses were, and how different the atmosphere of actual witch-hunts seemed to be from [her] received idea, based on slight knowledge of the European witch hunts and films and fiction" reaching the conclusion "that witchcraft existed in the minds of its persecutors" (Churchill, 1987, p.39), rather than being a historical phenomenon. Thus her question in the final song of the play "Is that what you want to see?" implies that "Evil women" are seen when they are wanted to be

seen “in the minds of their persecutors.” As for past, as for present. If the witch can be “seen” in the mind of the 17<sup>th</sup> century persecutor, then *Vinegar Tom* may well ask every woman in contemporary society to “Look in the mirror tonight” (20; 63) and ask herself “Would they have hanged you then?” (20; 64). Having done no wrong her answer would be negative. Yet, as *Vinegar Tom* attests, those who were hanged “They were *gentle* witches /with *healing* spells” (20; 46-7, emphasis added); they had no other fault than being “desperate witches/ with no way out but the other side of hell” (20; 60-1). They too had done no wrong. Therefore the contemporary woman should want to know “Who are the witches now?” (20; 39), and how she herself is possibly being “hanged.” “Ask how they’re stopping you now” (20; 65). The destinies of women, past and present, are intertwined in the fusion of history, spectacle and song. In this fusion the play ignores historical boundaries and, in our reading, solely feministic concerns, in its aspiration for deeper roots imbedded in universal human character. It reaches out beyond the particulars of a fragment of historical time and probes beyond insistence on a specific outlook in order to engage with the generalities of human nature.

The first of *Vinegar Tom*’s deviant, unconventional women is Alice. The play opens with a scene following the sexual encounter of Alice with a man. The Man asks her “so you think that was no sin we did” (1; 43) to which she answers “If it was I don’t care” (1; 44). Not only does she not care about sinning, she would actually be happy about it if others would leave her alone: “Any time I’m happy someone says it’s a sin” (1; 46-7). She is doing what makes her happy and thus for her it cannot be sin. However, her Christian, patriarchal society is unable to comprehend, nevertheless accept such liberalism. Even the very Man himself, having barely finished taking pleasure in her, construes their situation as a devilish one implying Alice’s witchcraft and trying to wrest some sort of confession from her. Alice, however, has no care about the devil and is too innocent to admit knowing anything about him:

MAN: If you come with me and give me body and soul, you’ll never want in this world.

ALICE: Are you saying that as a man?

MAN: Am I saying it as the devil?

ALICE: If you’re saying it as a man I’ll go with you. There’s no one round here knows me going to marry me. There’s no way I’ll get money. I’ve a child, mind, I’ll not leave the child. (1; 31-40)

Still, despite her innocence of the devil, Alice is part of the society where devil and witch are both realities of the material world. When the Man mentions a witch hunt in Scotland, Alice is immediately intrigued:

ALICE: Did you? A real witch? Was she a real one?

MAN: She was really burnt for one.

ALICE: Did the spirits fly out of her like black bats? Did the devil make the sky go dark? I’ve heard plenty tales of witches and I’ve heard some called witch, there’s one in the next village some say and others say not, but she’s nothing to see. Did she fly at night on a stick? Did you see her flying? (1; 90-100).

Alice’s remarks may be supposed ironic; the irony, however, deems more a subjective insinuation than a reflection of her words. Her attitude signals a society which has had her believe there is only one he—devil, yet plenty of she—witches. She truly believes if a witch is a “real” witch “spirits fly out of her like black bats” and the devil with whom the witch has a pact will “make the sky go dark.” The non-occurrence of such phenomena does not reveal the duplicitous nature of belief in witch; rather, it proves the inauthenticity of the woman labeled as witch. Alice—and by implication any other deviant female—is the first victim of the misogynistic scorn of *Vinegar Tom*’s society.

The next victim is Joan Noakes, Alice’s mother, an old woman who has had lesser days of poverty in her past. Joan’s only connection to witchcraft is her appearance – she is old and wrinkled, poor and dressed in rags – and her name, which evokes the names of Joan Williford and Joan Cardien, both convicted of witchcraft in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and executed consequently (qtd. in Khozaei Ravari, 2010, p. 124). Otherwise she’s a normal woman – only deviant. The patriarchal norm for a woman in Joan’s position is a grandmother sitting silently in a corner enjoying the sight of her grandchildren and maybe scolding them lovingly every now and again: “nobody loves you when you’re old, unless your someone’s gran./Nobody loves you unless you keep your mouth shut” (12; 49-52). But for Joan there is no such conformity. She says to Alice “If we’d each got a man we’d be better off” (3; 33). She would like to have a man and is not ashamed of it even though such desire would make others’ “blood run cold”. Joan is the “old woman” of whom the chorus sings:

I met an old woman

Who made my blood run cold.

You don’t stop wanting sex, she said,

Just because you’re old. (3; 40-44)

Also, in addition to being a socio-economic failure, Joan drinks which adds to her already dire predicament. Joan is poor. She drinks. She would like to have a man. She is now an ideal candidate for accusations of witchcraft.

Alice’s friend, Susan, is not deviant in the sense that Alice and her mother are but she is also not totally at home in the patriarchal society as is Margery, Joan’s neighbor. Having had several miscarriages and having “[n]early died last time” (5; 28) Susan’s present pregnancy is a serious burden that she can neither endure nor dare put an end to, having been weaned on the idea that “I must think on Eve who brought the sin into the world that got me pregnant. I must think on how woman tempts man, and how she pays God with her pain having the baby” (5; 38-42). In this confusion of natural instinct and patriarch-oriented religious inculcation she is pulled both ways: “I don’t want it but I don’t want to be rid of it. I want to be rid of it, but not to do anything to be rid of it” (8; 15-17). Finally, influenced by Alice and

Helen, the cunning woman, who provokes her with a mildly sarcastic yet apparently indifferent “[i]f you won’t do anything to help yourself you must stay as you are” (8; 18-19), she goes through with Ellen’s medication but, ultimately, the patriarchal values of *Vinegar Tom*’s society get the better of her. She is accused of being a witch for destroying her baby and is gullible enough to accept the accusation: “I was a witch and never knew it. I killed my babies. I never meant it. I didn’t know I was so wicked” (19; 21-23). She is totally subdued with the belief that woman must suffer from the sin Eve brought into the world and if she is unwilling to do so she must be wicked and a witch. In Susan’s case the man/woman relation reaches its endmost polarization with the former pole of the binary achieving its age-old desire: “the oppression of women happens because men want and like to dominate women and act out their hostility towards them” (Johnson, 2005, p. 28). Susan’s identity has been totally dissolved into the ideal role of patriarchal femininity.

More fortunate than the other victims is Betty. She is the daughter of a landowner and as such has less to fear in terms of witchcraft accusations. However, she is also victimized by patriarchy in that her marriage to a man has been decided-being highly beneficial for her parents-and since she is not willing to consent to the marriage, is being “treated” by a male doctor, presumably to be brought to her senses and realize her folly in trying to reject such an opportunity. Therefore, although “Betty’s usefulness as the glue in an economic alliance protects her from accusations of witchcraft” yet “the cruel medical treatment and forced marriage presents her with inexorable grim prospects” (Kritzer, 1991, p. 92). In her own words her situation is pitiful:

Why am I tied? Tied to be bled

Why am I bled? Because I was screaming

Why was I screaming? Because I’m bad.

Why was I bad? Because I was happy

Why was I happy? Because I ran out by myself and got away from them. (6; 1-6)

But the patriarchal view has everything under cold control; as the Doctor “wisely” pronounces: “hysteria is a woman’s weakness. Hysterion, Greek, the womb. Excessive blood causes an imbalance in the humors. The noxious gases that form inwardly every month rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient’s real feelings” (6; 11-17). Betty does not know her own good nor even her own feelings; her “real” feelings will be duly shown her by the male Doctor who knows her “humors” better than herself. After all, he is a *man* and she, a mere woman.

The final victim, Ellen, the cunning woman, is a real threat to *Vinegar Tom*’s male-oriented Christian society: her methods are “as great a threat (to the Catholic Church, if not the Protestant) as her results” since she relies “on her senses rather than on faith or doctrine” (Ehrenreich, English, 1973, p. 14). Ellen offers herbal treatment to women. Medical treatment is solely a male prerogative; she is trespassing into dangerous male territory. Working in this territory she also achieves economic independence which adds to her already highly presumptuous course of action. A woman “who earns her own living outside of the monetary system and works outside the sanctioned medical/male establishment” (Reinelt quoted in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 32), is a highly likely candidate for the witchcraft prize, hanging. Of the five victimized women, Joan and Ellen are hanged and the other three remain in a precarious balance of patriarchal whims. The overall estimation of *Vinegar Tom*’s patriarchal society, and by analogy of its presentation in contemporary theater, patriarchy in general, is that “women’s autonomous desires are seen as punishable offenses because they are committed without official sanctions” (Merill, 1988, p. 82).

The subjugation of women by men is taken for granted from the feminist point of view and aimed at with the most biting slander in feminist discourse since man is at the root of woman’s dilemmas. Although *Vinegar Tom* is a feminist work, yet it probes deeper than a superficial gloss on a fragment of history for the purpose of exposing patriarchy. Put in the words of a founding member off Monstrous Regiment (the company that produced the play) Gillian Hanna:

We had a very real feeling that we didn’t want to allow the audience to get off the hook by regarding it as a period piece, a piece of very interesting history. Now a lot of people felt their intelligence was affronted by that ... [but] I believe that the simple telling of the historical story, say, is not enough. (qtd. In Frances Savilonis, 2004, p. 99)

*Vinegar Tom* seems to sense a more human, more universally cajoling exertion at stake that surpasses the male/female binary and spies into human character itself. It senses a subtle nuance of mischief, deeper than the rigid insinuations of patriarchal convention, undulating unawares in the depths of the mystery which is mortal identity. This veiled influence lurks between the lines of the play where blatant male repression of the female characters daringly manifests itself; it shows in the transparent associations of those very characters with and among themselves.

After her sexual encounter with the Man, Alice pleads with him to take her to London. She is willing even to leave her old mother to fend for herself:

ALICE: Would you take me to London? I’ve nothing to keep me here except my mother and I’d leave her. (1; 70-2)

Although as their conversation continues, the Man asks “Will you kiss my arse like the devil makes his witches?” (1; 84-5), Alice is not offended and continues amiably “I’ll do what gives us pleasure. Was I good just now?” (1; 86-7). She keeps up her insistent pleading with him to take her until the man finally bursts out in reproach: “A whore? Take a whore with me?” (1; 124), to which Alice only responds with a mild “I’m not that” (1; 125). And again the Man’s verbal attack shows his disgust:

MAN: What are you then? What name would you put to yourself? You’re not a wife or a window. You’re not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are” (1; 126-9).

Alice's response to this evident show of aversion to her is very telling:

ALICE: You're not going? Stay a bit.

.....

MAN: Get away, will you

ALICE: Please

MAN: Get away

*She pushes her and she falls*

ALICE: Go to hell then, go to the devil you devil

.....

ALICE: But come back. I'll not curse you. Don't you curse. We were friends just now

MAN: You should have behaved better.

ALICE: Will I see you again? (1; 130-148)

And her pleading with him continues until he finally departs with "You won't be seeing me" (1; 165-6).

Alice's desire to go with the Man even at the price of sacrificing her old mother is understandable; her dire state of poverty and infamous reputation as a prostitute has made her life unbearable. Her passionate yearning to flee from her village is sanctioned by her abject misery. Even her mild response to his patriarchal naming maybe justifiable. From the man's perspective, being neither wife nor widow nor virgin which are the acceptable norms of his conventional mindset, Alice is a "whore." His evident disgust in her for being none other than a whore must be somehow warranted for him in the light of his very recent pleasure in her body. The pardon of bewitched surrender to the devil, can be that which allows for his pleasure yet vindicates his disregard of her. His fantasy of being possessed by the devil excuses his momentary sexual satisfaction yet exonerates his disgusted outburst at her impropriety, her being only a vile whore or witch:

MAN: You don't think I'm sent you by the devil? Sometimes I think the devil has me. And then I think there is no devil. And then I think the devil would make me think there was no devil. (1; 73-7)

Of course he cannot be blamed since the devil "has" him. It is she who is accountable since no one "has" her; according to his patriarchal doctrine she is "naturally evil." Even though it could be expected of Alice to show a slightly more vehement response to his labeling her a whore, her gentle "I'm not that" is, in light of her dire situation, understandable. However, after his outburst ending with "Tell me a name for what you are" her pleas for his staying just "a bit" longer go beyond social circumstances and the margins imposed by patriarchal subjugation and reach further down surpassing female identity shaped by patriarchy, into human character. Sexual love between Alice and the Man is impossible (Diamond, 1988, p. 197). It is evident from his remarks that the Man has no further interest in her, as it is equally evident that he cannot be available to her emotionally or of use to her economically. Yet Alice is not only unresentful of his coarse behavior and remarks coming barely after having used her, but pleads with him to remain. Even days after their encounter Alice is still thinking of the Man. She is no child; she is a mother with child. She knows that a man of any rank would want nothing to do with a poor disreputable woman like her, yet she "could do with it now" she says; she "could do with walking across that field again and finding him there just the same" (5; 70-3). From a feminist perspective using her as he did would suffice for the Man to be the target of interminable scorn for Alice; yet, obviously she is no feminist. Nor does *Vinegar Tom* display any emotional outburst of feminist scorn.

Margery and Jack are the well-to-do neighbors of Joan and Alice. Margery in Joan's words is a "woman comfortable off with a fine man and a nice field and five cows" (4; 48-50) and many other possessions, enough to make her smugly comfortable. Therefore the probability of any capitalist-based competitive tension between her and the old poverty-stricken Joan can only prove unrealistic illusion. When Joan goes to Margery's dairy to ask her for a little yeast she is answered with more than a rejection. Joan's request starts innocently enough:

JOAN: A little small crumb of yeast and God will bless you for kindness to your poor old neighbor (4; 58-60).

However, Margery's unresponsiveness leads to a more heated conversation culminating in her unreasonable accusation of stealing:

MARGERY: There's nobody curses me. Now get out of my dairy. Dirty old woman you are, smelling of drink, come in here day after day begging, and stealing, too, I shouldn't wonder. (4; 85-89)

Margery's "I shouldn't wonder" obviously shows that she herself does not believe Joan to be a thief but she accuses her anyway, adding a biting, uncalled-for share of cruelty. And thereafter Margery repeats once more "Get out of my dairy" (4; 92-3). The possessive "my" used twice in succession has some implications even though it may be a sign of idiosyncrasy, but when a few lines later it is repeated again in Margery's "Now get out, I'm making my butter" (4; 97-8), it is clear that she feels no feministic companionship between herself and her old, pitiful female neighbor. It is her dairy and her butter. The three repetitions of "my" juxtaposed with Joan's plea for "a little small crumb of yeast" also evokes a critique of heartlessness induced by capitalist values.

Some time after Margery's encounter with Joan which ends in Joan's emphatic cursing of Margery's "man" and "fields" and "cows" and all else that comes into her mind (4; 101-5), Jack and Margery have problems. Their calves swell and stench and Margery feels she has terrible pains. Jack gives the first interpretation, imputing these misfortunes to his sins: "My sins stinking and swelling up" (7; 67). It is Margery who encourages another explanation:

MARGERY: If it's not God.

JACK: What?

MARGERY: If it's not God sends the trouble

JACK: The devil?

MARGERY: One of his servants. If we're bewitched, Jack, that explains all.

JACK: If we're bewitched... (7; 72-77)

And from here, concluding who the witch might be is not much of a mystery. Later they go to Ellen, the cunning woman, to determine for certain who the witch is. Ellen gives them a glass to look into and see the witch for themselves. It is no surprise that Jack would fancy seeing Joan in the glass; he is the patriarchal-minded male figure. But Margery is herself a victim. Jack habitually calls her a "lazy slut" (4; 119) through no fault of hers. She, at least, should feel some compassion for her female peer who "[t]ime was she was neighborly enough" (10; 23-4). Yet it is she again who provokes Joan's accusation:

MARGERY: Look

JACK: What?

MARGERY: Did something move in the glass? My heart's beating so.

JACK: It's too dark

MARGERY: No. Look

JACK: I did see something

MARGERY: It's the witch

JACK: It's her sure enough

MARGERY: It is, isn't it, Jack? Mother Noakes, isn't it?

JACK: It was mother Noakes in that glass.

ELLEN: There then. You have what you came for. (10; 50-63)

Margery creates the vision of mother Noakes as that of a witch and Ellen stamps its final confirmation. In the patriarchal society of *Vinegar Tom* where women are the victims, they themselves also seek their own victims among their own kind. Margery and Ellen, two women, themselves objects of male discrimination, become for Joan whom they sentence, a jury of her peers.

Packer and Goody are two "witch-hunters" who come to *Vinegar Tom's* village. They are "experts" who efficiently find the marks of "witchcraft" on witches' bodies by looking it over naked. As soon as the witch is recognized as such, her punishment of hanging is carried out. Of *Vinegar Tom's* five deviant women Joan and Ellen are identified and hanged. Alice and Susan wait their turn. Goody is a woman and very well aware of the plight of other women. Of her own work as Henry Packer's assistant she says: "Better than staying home a widow. I'd end up like the old women you see, soft in the head and full of spite with their muttering and spells" (15; 44-8). She considers it "an honor to work with a great professional" (15; 49-50). Feminist solidarity is lost on Goody as long as she can "do good at the same time as earning a living" (15; 43-4). "While Goody justifies her torture and murder of other women on grounds of keeping the country healthy, it soon becomes apparent that she is primarily motivated by self-interest" (Morelli, 1998, p. 104). She too, is a victimizer of her own peers.

Perhaps the strongest instance in *Vinegar Tom* of faithlessness is that of Susan in relation to Alice. After torturing her by pricking her body to find the "devilish spot" which feels no pain and furnishes no blood, Packer and Goody tire of finding nothing with which to accuse Alice of and decide to seek evidence of her witchcraft from others. Unexpectedly surprising is the fact that it is her friend, Susan, who speaks out against her:

SUSAN: I know something of her

PACKER: Don't be shy then girl, speak out.

ALICE: Susan, what are you doing? Don't speak against me.

SUSAN: Don't let her at me.

ALICE: You'll have me hanged

SUSAN *starts to shriek hysterically* (14; 84-90)

Alice is taken out and Susan, calm again, initiates her evidence:

SUSAN: She met with the devil, she told me, like a man in black she met him in the night and did uncleanness with him, and ever after she was not herself to want to be with the devil again. (14; 101-105)

Alice's sexual encounter with the Man becomes in Susan's account a rendezvous with the devil himself. Alice and Susan's friendship whereby Alice puts Susan into her most intimate confidence by recounting her episode with the Man is sacrificed and takes a sudden unexpected twist when Susan becomes Alice's arch enemy. Susan had in a previous encounter between Alice and Jack, suddenly decided that Alice was in fact a witch. Jack appears one day-while Alice and Susan are together-calling Alice a witch and looking as if he were drunk. He grabs Alice around the neck hard and threatens Alice to return his manliness to him. Alice, half suffocating sees no other choice than to play along. She puts her hand between his thighs as if giving back his organ:

ALICE: There. It's back.

JACK: It is. It's back. Thank you Alice I wasn't sure you were a witch till then.

JACK *goes*

SUSAN: what are you doing Alice? Alice? Alice?

ALICE turns to her

ALICE: It's nothing. He's mad. Oh my neck, Susan. Oh, I'd laugh if it didn't hurt.

SUSAN: Don't touch me. I'll not be touched by a witch. (13; 142-151).

Alice turns amiably to Susan saying she could laugh at this comic episode; Susan, however, has a totally different view. She has inwardly confirmed that Alice is a witch. It is intriguing to think on this sudden turn of attitude in Susan towards Alice. Of course the whole scene can be dismissed on account of Susan's being more than gullible; yet the fact remains, as is evinced by other articulations within the play, that Alice does have a strange charm over Jack. Despite the fact that she is labeled a prostitute and Margery, Jack's wife, is a reputable woman, yet it is Alice who has a "spell" over Jack not his reputable and therefore presumably lovable wife. Equally intriguing is the fact that despite her poverty and her infamous reputation in the village as a prostitute, Alice rejects Jack's offer of financial support in return for her favors:

JACK: Alice, I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man. I could give you things for your boy....

ALICE: Go away to hell. (5; 141-4).

Thus, Susan's confusion in this ambiguous state of affairs may not be as far off the mark as one might imagine. In that Alice has a certain influence over Jack, she does tend towards a mysterious nuance of "witchcraft," if not witchcraft in its superstitious meaning. From the perspective of male authority 'Jack endows Alice with the power of the phallus in order to repossess his organ, but then, newly authorized and empowered, he must subdue her by "seeing" her as, labeling her a witch' (Diamond, 1988, p. 194). One orientation is that "[i]f Jack hardly seems in a phallic position of knowledge and authority, Susan as spectator believes that he is" (p. 194). It is possible that Susan also sees in Alice a power independent of Jack's phallic authority, a power which not only Jack fears but also puts Susan herself in awe or, maybe, a feeling closer to despair since it is Alice and not her who had the power to deprive Jack of his phallus to begin with. Before being "endowed with the power of the phallus" it was Alice who usurped that power with a feminine vitality independent of the patriarchal society which empowers Jack with "a phallic position of knowledge and authority." It is therefore not only "a phallic economy based on castration fear" (p. 194) that must "see" Alice as a witch but also a fear of the initial power of castration which does not necessarily originate in the male mentality. Susan also "sees" Alice as a witch and Alice's status thereafter is a precarious one.

Thus, as one of those playwrights who "don't give answers; they ask questions" (Aston, Diamond, 2009, p. 10) Caryl Churchill in *Vinegar Tom* exposes the patriarchal constitution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and its persecution of women under the pretext of abominable witchcraft asking simultaneously, "where are the witches now?" At the same time, in her satiric treatment of witchcraft she mocks the notion of witch and devil but in the "devilish" behavior of her characters she implicitly asks, not solely from a feminist perspective, is "devil" not a possibility on a human level? And finally, not exempting women themselves in the persecution of other women-given extra emphasis in that the two arch misogynists of the play, the "Professors of Theology," Kramer and Spencer are played by the actors of Ellen and Mother Noakes who thus compound victimizer and victim -and bringing past and present in theatrical conjunction, she provokes us to ask, is female victimization exclusively in male competence and is the concept of "witch" only the folly of the 17<sup>th</sup> century?

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